

## II

### A FEDERATION OF CHURCHES

I AM honored by the privilege of participating in this festival of education and good-fellowship with our distinguished guests, not only from this region of the country, but from across the seas. We are learning, I think, in these days what immeasurable significance is to be attached to the privilege which America has had of participating, to some degree at least, in this great world controversy by the side of older nations; and no nation has made more honorable that connection than Great Britain herself, with her distinguished history and her almost incredible achievements in this war.

The problems of religion must relate themselves very intimately to the whole structure of modern life. We are conscious of the fact that in this world struggle we have been compelled to think through many questions with which we were but casually concerned before. I would not envy any man a state of mind in which he could have lived through the past five years and remained unrevolutionized in every fiber of being, in every element of experience. It is the most tremendous period the world has encountered since the advent of our Lord.

We are compelled, of course, now to face our problems of readjustment and reconstruction in the fields of education, of religion, and of world peace. The word "reconstruction" is a word to conjure with to-day, and there are many people using it, and destined to use it, with the feel-

ing that they have solved the question when they have used the word frequently enough. They are going to feel that the mere presence of the word in their vocabulary is a kind of solution of a great problem. We are likely to grow weary of the word "reconstruction"; but it is here, or, at least, the things for which it stands. And no phase of the problem is more impressive than that which relates to the church after the war.

Here in America we have a particular aspect of that problem, for we are unhappily conscious of the fact that it was impossible for the church of Jesus Christ to function in the war as a church. We were anxious that it should. We should have been delighted had that been possible. But we were face to face with the fact that the circumstances of our divided condition made it inopportune or impracticable for us to speak with one voice. The result was that in the opening of the war there was an organization that was compelled to speak for the entire church. That organization was the Young Men's Christian Association, and it met the emergency in a magnificent manner. It spoke in such a whole-hearted, serviceable way that the world has stood, in a sense, with uncovered head in the presence of that organization. In spite of criticisms, inevitable in connection with so huge a task, the boys who have come back from the front have borne testimony to its ministry.

Now we recognize that at the moment when the war is over we are coming back to the problem as to what shall become of religion in our local communities. I am not thinking merely of the fact that when the boys come back they are going to demand certain things. We have a way of saying: "When the boys come back things are going to happen." Of course they are. Everything is going to happen when the boys come back. But perhaps it will not happen in just

the fashion that we imagine. We are accustomed to believe that the return of the boys is going to bring to pass things which we want; that whatever our ideals may be, we are going to realize them when the boys come home. This is a kind of optimism which it is a joy to possess. None the less, is it not true that we are facing a changed condition which is not the result alone of the closing of the war? We shall be living in a somewhat different world. What is to be the status of religion in our towns and cities after the war is over? It is not going to be just what it was before. It will be either greater or less, and the circumstance which contributes most to the complexity of the situation is the fact that we face the unfortunate condition of a divided church.

When you visit the city of Cairo, or Constantinople, or Damascus, or any of the great Mohammedan centers, you are made aware of the great number of mosques. They look to heaven, their minarets, from which the chant of the muezzin goes out five times a day. You say to yourself: "This is most interesting. To what denomination can these different mosques belong?" You ask some Mohammedan: "What is the difference between this mosque and the one over there?" He will say to you: "The difference is one of locality. The people of this section worship in this mosque, and those over yonder in the other." But you say: "You do not understand me. I mean what is the difference in the names and creeds of these different mosques? What different sects have you?" He will say: "Sects? I do not quite understand you. What do you mean by sects? We are Mohammedans. We are confessors of the Prophet. We have one ritual. We have one watchword." You will say to him: "You do not mean to tell me that all of these different mosques represent one point of view in religion, one great confession of faith?" He will say to you: "Cer-

tainly; that is exactly what I mean. There may be technical differences in the schools, which are beneath the churches. But so far as the worshipers are concerned, we are of one faith and one confession."

Then one comes back to the religious situation in America or anywhere in Christendom, and he realizes that we are at a tremendous disadvantage because we have become divided; we lack the efficiency of unity. With the humbler mood which comes with this reflection, we are interested to listen to our greatest human teacher—History. How did we come to be in this divided condition? We are aware, of course, that in the beginnings of the Christian society our Lord went about in a very simple way, and preached his message of good will to the men and women of his time. He called them to himself and his programme of good will. Gradually they formed themselves in a little group, bound together by common purposes. The Master had no definitive plan of church government so far as we can judge from the New Testament sources, nor had his first disciples. They seem to have adopted the customs of the localities in which they lived as to forms of organization. Thus Christianity grew. A new and strange voice was heard upon the streets of the old and weary world. In its freshness and vigor Christianity began to win its way and dominate men. Of all the forces that entered into the great complex of history in the days of the Roman Empire, it was the one least of all expected to survive; and yet two or three centuries later, among the forces which controlled the empire, Christianity was triumphant. From that time it went on from strength to strength. We have our convictions concerning the great church of the Middle Ages, the masterful organization that was built up by the Leos and Gregorys. Yet in spite of Protestant leanings, the student of history is free to affirm

that had it not been for the presence of that organization, that masterful, imperial organization, in the chaos and welter of those terrible years, society in Europe would probably have gone to pieces in complete anarchy. It was because there was an organization, and a spirit that laid hold upon the conscience of men and demanded obedience, that there emerged at last something of order out of this turmoil of the conflict between church and state, and between barbarism and civilization.

And yet the authority of the church was often very severe. Men of the free spirit felt it was difficult to submit themselves to the will of that one controlling church. Therefore gradually appeared the dissenting bodies. There were two principles always struggling for mastery. One was the principle of unity, and the other was that of liberty. The church of that time held relentlessly to the first, and it preserved unity by suppression of dissent and by persecution. As a result, there arose such separatist groups as those of the Albigenses, the Waldenses, and the Lollards, who were the unhappy victims of the repressive efforts made by the mother church to preserve unity and maintain an impressive solidarity before the world.

If there could have been preserved a leadership of the type of Hildebrand in the papal church, there might have been less need of a Reformation. If there had been more leaders with the conciliatory spirit, there might have been no need for a Martin Luther and the break with Rome. But that break came, made possible by that other great movement, the Renaissance. It is an interesting fact that on the day in which Girolamo Savonarola, one of the great morning stars of the Reformation, was born in 1453, the city of Constantinople fell. That fall released the cloistered spirit of the ancient East, and made available the elements of the

classic culture. It brought the Renaissance and the Reformation. The two came together. It has been well said that the Renaissance was the reformation of the European intellect, the Reformation was the renaissance of the European conscience. It was a new life breaking out in the moribund church of that day. The principles of liberty and unity were still in conflict. The impressive unity of the Roman Church was broken by the Reformation, and the one church took on different forms. Then came the Lutheran movement in Germany, with its principle of the open Bible; the Calvinistic organization in Switzerland and France, with the doctrine of the sovereignty of God over against the sovereignty of pope, cardinal, and council; the Church of England, with its reformation spirit which harmonized the ancient and beautiful rituals of the church with the principle of freedom; the work of John Wesley, with its insistence upon the immediate approach of the soul to God; Congregationalism, whether represented by the Brownists at Scrooby or the Pilgrims at Leyden; and the Anabaptists, persecuted as they had been, but standing earnestly for their belief in the essentials of primitive Christianity only. These are examples of that complexity of interest which broke the church into fragments but saved it from failure. The student of history will affirm with emphasis that it is better for the church to be broken even into this variety of fragments, than for it to remain as it was in the days of Leo X.

One must not gain the impression that Protestantism went its various ways without earnest protest against the resulting disunity, and earnest efforts to heal the rents in the seamless garment of Christ. One has only to search the pages of church history to perceive that there were many troubled souls, both Romanists and Reformers, who pleaded with all their power against the dismemberment of the church.

There is the account of the Marburg Conference, to the effect that Luther and Zwingli actually reached agreement upon fourteen and one half of the fifteen principles which they discussed, and yet separated because they could not agree upon that last remnant of doctrine. You have the letters of Bossuet, the Roman Catholic, who carried on his correspondence with Leibnitz in the effort to effect a reconciliation between the two parties. You have the record of the similar work done by Hugo Grotius. There were the long labors of Richard Baxter, attempting to organize a Christian association for the promotion of unity in England. There was the protest of John Milton in that unpublished work of his on "The Christian Church," in which he insisted upon the preaching and practice of apostolic Christianity as the only solution for the evils of growing sectarianism. Pope Leo XI wrote letters to leaders of the Reformation and to men of his own church, discussing plans for the restoration of unity. If it had been possible for such a reformation as that of Ignatius Loyola and his followers to have taken form within the church prior to the work of Martin Luther, the historic Reformation and the consequent divisions might not have occurred.

When one studies this question from the standpoint of our American Christianity, we perceive that we have here suffered even more than has Europe from the misfortune of a divided church. In the opening of our history the remnants of doctrinal controversy of the older churches in Europe came over to us, and communities were broken up into sects and parties often bitterly hating each other. For example, Presbyterianism in America was represented by fourteen different sorts of organization, and they were so antagonistic that they could not even worship with one another at infrequent periods of the communion service. In that day

one man made so dangerous and seditious a suggestion as that, since most of the congregations of a given locality were without preaching, they come together once in three months at least and listen to the preaching of an accredited ordained preacher; so revolutionary and heretical seemed that suggestion, that by the process of elbowing and heresy-hunting, which was rife in that day and is not wholly extinct at the present time, this man found himself outside the church.

Certain movements in the church of God in America were started for the purpose of regaining something of the lost unity of the church. At least four such efforts have had their origin in this motive. There was the work of James O'Kelley in Virginia. There was the Abner Jones movement in the Baptist Church in Vermont in 1800. There was the work of B. W. Stone in 1801 in Tennessee and Kentucky, which resulted in the organization of the Christian Connection. There were the Disciples of Christ, who, under the leadership of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, in 1809 spread through western Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Kentucky. All of these were definite movements for the purpose of restoring and reclaiming in some fashion the lost unity of the church of God. That impulse has gone on. Impressive agencies have sprung up in the life of the church. The Evangelical Alliance, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Society of Christian Endeavor and its allied movements, the student missionary propaganda and educational activities, the Laymen's Missionary Movement work, the great Evangelistic Union services that have been held in different parts of the country, are all movements in the same direction for restoring, if possible, the unity of the church.

Nor are we in America the only ones who have faced the problem. In Great Britain there has been an equally sensi-



tive spirit. The Church of Scotland, divided into great sections, united in 1900, and the question as to whether the older Church of Scotland might not unite with this united Free Church has been given consideration of late. There is the organization known as the Free Church Council of Great Britain. The Church of England has been sensitive to these matters. As long ago as 1910, Bishop Brent of the Philippine Islands preached in Westminster Abbey a sermon in which he advocated very definitely the holding of a great world conference on faith and order. That suggestion of his was taken up soon afterward by American Episcopalians, and a commission on Christian Unity to promote the suggestion made by Bishop Brent was organized. A delegation, consisting not only of Episcopalians but of other evangelical churchmen, was sent from this country to Great Britain to confer with the archbishops of York and Canterbury and other representatives of the Church of England on this theme, and it was received cordially. The coming on of the war made it impossible to continue this plan at the time, but with the coming of peace the effort is to be resumed, and no doubt some time in the not distant future such a conference on faith and order will be held.

It is interesting to see how the missionary work has demanded and stimulated unified work. The missionary teaches us our most important lessons. The things which have happened upon foreign soil in many places have driven the missionaries together. The practice of unity has grown on foreign soil much more rapidly than it has here. These men are driven together by the impact of the mass of superstition and sin around them. A similar lesson is being learned at home. As a result of this increasing sentiment notable efforts toward union have taken place in America within the past few years. There has been a gradual reconstruction in

Baptist circles north and south looking toward unification of missionary forces. The northern and southern wings of Methodists, Presbyterians, and other denominations are on the point of union. A few years ago, in Dayton, Ohio, representatives of three of the great American denominations, the Congregationalists, the Protestant Methodists, and the United Brethren, met to plan a merger. The matter has not been consummated, but the impulse and purpose of that gathering will not be lost. In Canada a still more remarkable thing has taken place. There, as long ago as 1910, the three great churches, the Congregationalists, the Methodists, and the Presbyterians (the Baptists had already united thirty years before, and the Presbyterians of many different sorts had come together forty years before)—these three churches came together and said: "We ought to be one." They took the question to heart, and because the people of Canada are perhaps a little more tenacious of doctrinal matters than some of us in the States, they decided upon a creed of nineteen articles, upon a form of organization which approximates that of the Congregationalists, and upon forms of association that would include the usages of all three. The complete union waits only the ratification of the Presbyterian Church, which has decided through its unofficial sources that as soon as the war problems are over it will take definite action concerning that matter.

The most impressive of all these forms of Christian cooperation is that which we know as Church Federation. It attempts to realize the measure of unity actually attained. It opens a way of coöperation on which the churches can go as far as they wish in the direction of unity. It asks for no compromise on matters of conviction. No union is worth while that does not safeguard the precious heritage of the past. But it is essential that we should live together in com-

munities, and denominational loyalty must be judged in the light of present emergency and efficiency. One recalls many instances in which communities of perhaps 1200 or 1500 people are ministered to by three or four rival churches, in which no element of efficiency is safeguarded, and only denominational interests are preserved. Sensible people come presently to feel that such conditions cannot persist, and that for the sake of fruitful service and efficiency in the administration of the affairs of the Kingdom of God, there must be coördination in such places. Some of them do not desire to have organic and incorporating unity. Therefore they have been interested to have some kind of federation, in which perhaps a Congregational and a Baptist church might unite in worship and work, while no element of the ancient heritage of doctrine is lost. Such coöperative union is taking place in very many localities in various parts of the country, and it is destined to go still further as the spirit of good will prevails, and good will takes the place of former sectism, the most frequent curse of small localities.

There is less trouble in the great cities. There we do not have trouble in uniting the Christian forces. There the impact of evil is so manifest, and the problems are so acute, that church federation or other forms of Christian unity are not difficult to achieve. But in the small places, where there is prejudice, where there is the narrowness of sectarianism, one finds the chief difficulty.

What is to be the situation after the war? In the larger cities in the United States there are some sixteen organizations of the nature of church federations. These federations have come gradually into being as the result of the great spirit of coöperation and union in America that began to take form as early as the year 1900. In the year 1904 a great conference was held in New York; in 1908 one—the

second quadrennial—was held in Philadelphia; in 1912 the third quadrennial of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America was held in Chicago; in the year 1916 the fourth of these great gatherings was held in the city of St. Louis. In 1917 there was a kind of intercalary or special gathering held in the city of Washington for the study of war problems. We are face to face with the fact of church federation, not as an end in itself, but as a means of consummating gradually that union for which the Master prayed and to which his disciples dedicated themselves. Church federation as a stepping-stone in that direction is certain to be a very much more widely accepted method than ever before.

For the most part the Protestant Episcopal Church has not participated in fellowship. Perhaps it is inhibited by tradition, or perhaps it is already in some other federation, and yet both the Church of England and the Protestant Episcopal Church have manifested very great solicitude in reference to Christian unity. The Lambeth-Chicago proposals, that were made as far back as 1888 and repeated in 1910, proposed to the church the essential value and need of unity, and proposed as the grounds of that unity the Holy Scriptures, the great historic creeds, the sacraments of the church, and the historic episcopate. While this quadrilateral basis has not seemed to most of the Protestant churches to be practical, none the less it is a favorable token of the growing spirit of good will. All such efforts deepen the feeling of interest in the programme of unifying as far as possible the divided church of God. For this and many other reasons we are looking forward with satisfaction to the developments of the days which are before us. What form is this unity to take? Of course we do not know, and one can prophesy as well as another. We know it is taking on

the foreign fields the form of a complete unity of Protestantism, with such names as the United Church of Christ in Japan, in South India, in the Philippine Islands, and in other portions of the missionary world. In America there is a very strong sentiment in favor of closer unification of the people of God. It is a matter of economic efficiency as well as obedience to our Saviour's will and to apostolic injunctions. We know it is on the historic line of progress. The church of God is not static in the world. If, unaware of the record of history, we could look upon the world, divided as it is among these different creeds and denominations, we should feel perhaps that it was a static world into which we had been born, and that all things have continued from the beginning as we see them now. We know, however, that it is not true. We know the movement of growth, of evolution, goes evermore forward; it is merely a question as to the course that the spirit of God is marking out for us in the realization of the church unity which is to come. Every obstacle, every barrier, in the way of closer coöperation is falling. Is that closer coöperation going to lead to organic unity in America, as it is leading to organic unity in the far places of the world? Where men are bowing down before idols of wood and stone, it seems a pathetic fact that matters of dogma and ritual and organization, however useful and honorable, should stand in the way of the union of the people of God, who, by the gospel, by education, and by good will, are moving forward to the conquest of the spiritual life of the world. If that is true on foreign soil, why should it be less true in America, where men are betrayed into worship of the idols of the market-place? We are, therefore, watching with keen interest the signs of promise in the eastern skies, and we are giving to ourselves the satisfaction of eager coöperation—not waiting to compel others to lead in

this work, but each in his own place building opposite his own house on the walls of the city of God.

I have often thought of that particularly interesting episode that transpired at the Queen's Jubilee some years ago, the impressive ceremony in Westminster Abbey, in which the fifty years of Queen Victoria's successful and beloved reign were celebrated. The Abbey was filled with a great throng of people. One after another, the official body representing the English Government marched in and took their seats. There came the High Court of Justice, led by its presiding judge, and by his side there walked the mace-bearer, with the ancient golden symbol representing the delegated authority of the sovereign to the court of justice. The mace was laid upon the table before the high altar. Then came the House of Lords, led by its presiding officer, and by his side there walked another of these mace-bearers, carrying the symbol of the delegated authority of the sovereign to the House of Lords. Then there came the House of Commons, and their mace was laid by the side of the other two. But when the strains of the organ moved onward from the simple introduction into the stirring notes of "God Save the Queen," her Majesty took her place on the throne, and the servitors of the golden symbols hastened to cover up the maces and hide them from sight. They were no longer needed, for her Majesty was there in her own person.

When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, in humanity redeemed, in the readjustment of social relations, in the coming of a new era, of better understanding between all classes in the republic and the world, a new era of spiritual power, of education and good will, then we shall not need the symbols of denominational authority and history. They will all be precious to us as historical memorials, but they will no longer be essential to a unified and commanding

faith, for He Himself will be with us, and the historic symbols of His presence will be unnecessary. In such a day as that we shall be able to understand as the prophet foretold: He has seen something of the travail of His soul through the ministry of His people and is satisfied; and in such a day in fuller measure He will receive the nation for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession.

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